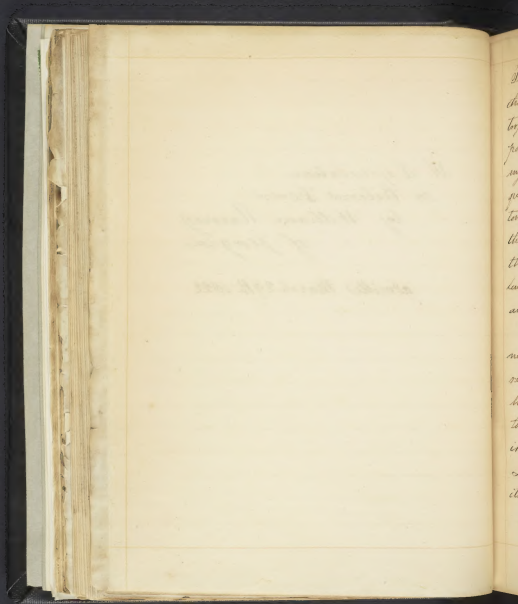


23
A Dissertation
on Bilious Fever
by William Rainey
of Georgia

admitted March 29th 1822



There is no organ, if we except the Stomach, that is so generally interested in the diseases of tropical climates, as the Liver. Such is the importance of its secretion in the digestive economy, that a derangement of its functions frequently gives rise to the most alarming symptoms. It is from an idea of the influence of the Liver over the system, probably, through the medium of the Stomach, that certain violent fevers attended by hepatic derangement, are called bilious.

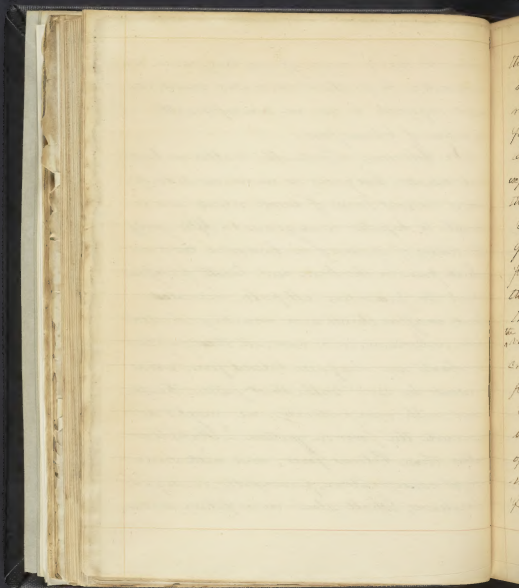
Few travellers who have visited the burning regions of the Indies, have failed to remark the ravages of this scourge of the human race. It is not, however, peculiar to those climes; the breeze of summer wafts it into the bosom of our country, and from Louisiana, far to the north, we can trace its deadly career.

The variety of forms which the disorders

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referred to hepatic origin of fevers, being liable to modification by peculiar accidental causes, renders it impossible to give an unexceptionable definition of bilious fever.

Dr Johnson, in ^{his} valuable treatise on tropical diseases, has given us numerous descriptions of various forms of disease which are referable to hepatic derangement. After giving the history of upwards of one hundred cases in which pain in the head and breast, oppression about the praecordia, full pulse, increased heat, excessive thirst and vanishing of viscid bile, delirium, in a word, all these symptoms by which we recognise bilious fever; more recent, he says, "With strict justice therefore, and with more propriety, we might designate the fever in question — "Hepatic" rather than Bilious fever; and with some slight modification, principally in degree of violence, I shall shew in a future section,

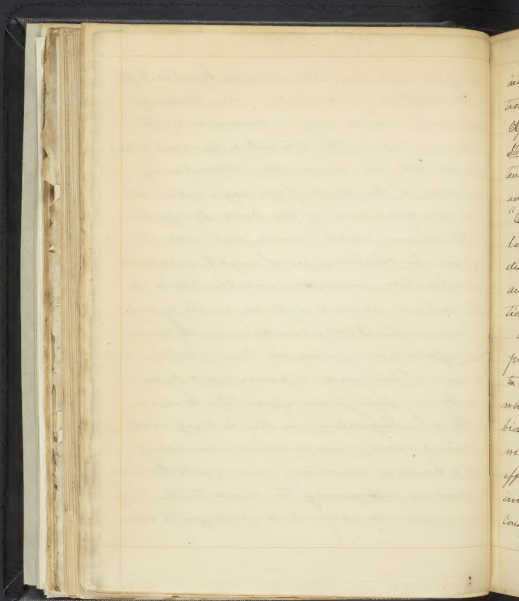


that in reality, it is either or some hepatitis itself.

He arrives at this conclusion by a train of reasoning which may be condensed in the following words. The external cutaneous vessels are excited into inordinate action during exposure to the heat of the day, with which the venaportarum of the Liver-Sympathetic

The sudden check which these receive from the chilling air of night, arrests the perspiration and determines the blood to the interior which is impeded in its passage through the Liver, and accumulates in ^{the} venaportarum, giving rise to a vitiated secretion of bile and a pernicious sympathetic impression upon the brain.

The bile stagnating in the biliary ducts, becomes viscid; and a commencement of a hurried secretion, from emetics & other medicines, determining the blood to the surface, often so obstructs the passage to the

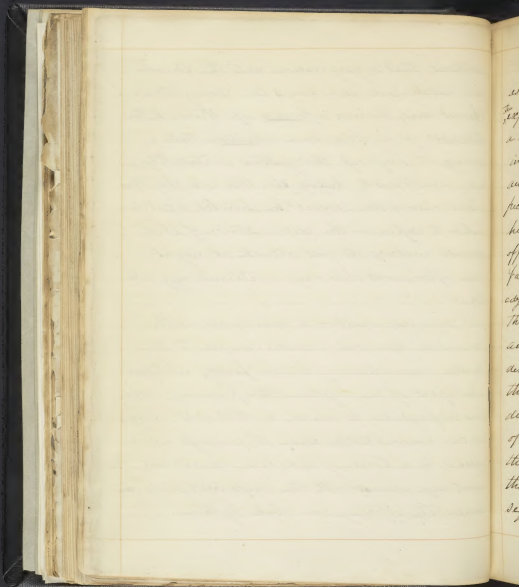


intestines, that regurgitation into the circulation takes place, and tinges the skin yellow.

A great deal, however, is forced up through the Stomach in a spasmodic and vilitated state; tending to keep up the gastric irritability, and sometimes to destroy the stomach altogether.

"This view of the subject he thinks, is calculation to explain the circumstance of this disease making its first attack at night and afterwards observing nocturnal aggravations.

It is no easy matter to determine with precision how many causes conspire to the production of bilious fever; nor upon what part of the system the primary morbid impression is made; be that as it may, we can undoubtedly trace its progress and effects by a train of sympathetic actions involving almost all the important viscera, consequently, affecting the whole system.



The well known importance of the Stomach
as a centre of sympathy, if I may be allowed
^{an} expression, induces me to think that it takes
a more active ^{part} in the production of the disease
in question, than the above mentioned
author seems disposed to assign to it. I sus-
pect that in every instance of pain in the
head, the Stomach will be found to contain
offensive matter. An emetic seldom if ever,
fails to alleviate it; but how could this reme-
dy be effectual if the sympathy upon which
the pain depends exists between the liver-
and the brain? I do not wish to be un-
derstood as denying that the functions of
the Liver are ~~not~~ deranged during the
disease; we have but too much evidence
of it in the pain and enlargement of
that viscus during the active period of
that "fever" and the inflammation and their
sequelæ which remain long after the

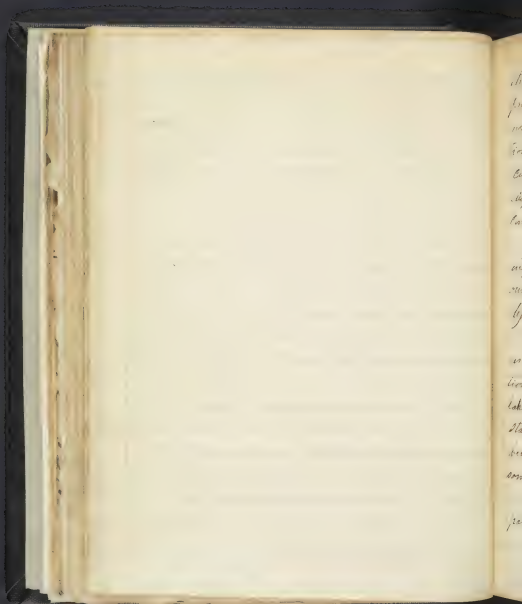


disappearance of every other symptom to which it gave rise.

These views of the subject appear to supersede the necessity of miasmata in the production of fever; but the ~~the~~ existence of agents of this kind is far from being disproved.

The prevalence of bilious fever in hot climates, where vegetation is luxuriant and vegetable putrefaction consequently extending more especially in the immediate vicinity of marshes &c. is a strong presumptive argument in favour of their agency in giving rise to various morbid actions of the human system.

All ages and varieties of constitution appear to be obnoxious to this disease, though they undoubtedly differ in this respect, in degree. Dr Johnson thinks that at about the age of manhood, man is more liable to the bilious fever, ~~than~~ as it occurs in the East



show either before or after. It is not im-
probable that the reason of this is in part,
not in any peculiar liability of the constitu-
tion at that age, but rather, in the cir-
cumstances of greater exposure, and less
disposition to cautionary discipline, so
common to that native period of life.

The continuous nature is at this time
impaired indeed, and it is not agreeable to
our reason to suppose that we are then
less strongly governed by it.

The forms of disease termed bilious
are modified by peculiarities of constitu-
tion and climate. More particularly of the
latter, - as it would appear by the circum-
stances of many inhabitants of our place
being affected in a similar manner though
somewhat differently from those of another.

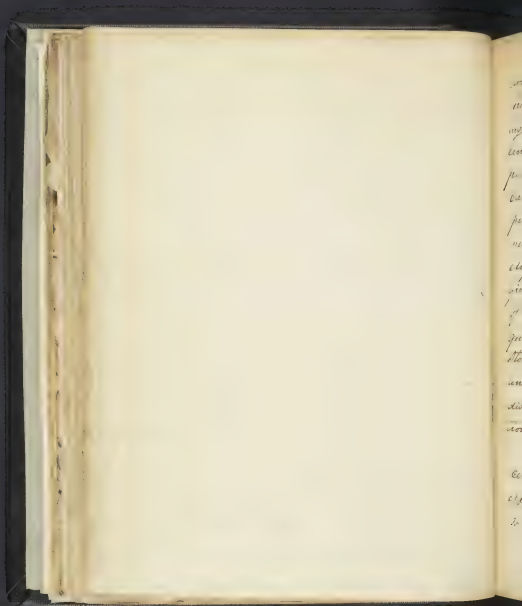
Whence the bilious fever of Bengal, the
patient would be seized with delirium -

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in the very commencement, while in our
hemisphere its attack is more gradual.
We do not frequently meet with instances
in our northern climate, in which the
fever hurries through the rapid career
which marks the more inveterate charac-
ter of the oriental disease.

In the treatment of this disease one in-
dication presents itself at an early period,
viz. to unload the stomach and intestines of
their morbid contents. The pain in the
head, indicative of gastric irritation, and
other unpleasant symptoms are quickly
relieved by an evacuation of the stomach,
hence the propriety of administering an
emetic at an early stage of the disease.

If the cerebral action is considerable, bleed-
letting should precede all other remedies,
especially emetics, if any determination to
the head is apparent. Such are remedies



are not so early, unless when the skin is
hot and dry. They seldom produce
any perspiration, in which the more dis-
tinct and distinguishing symptoms are tem-
porarily subdued. The salutary effects of
calomel upon both the Stomach and Liver,
perhaps in the latter more in its sympathy
with the former, point it out as the most
eligible cathartic. It should, however, be
given with other intentions besides that
of a mere evacuant. In small doses fre-
quently repeated, it restores the tone of the
Stomach and relieves the distressing pain
and irritability so common in these
diseases which involve the hepatic func-
tions.

Warm bathing has been resorted to in
certain stages of this disease, but its good
effects appear to be so precarious and at best
so transient, that it will not probably

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ever come into general use. Time and circumstances, however, so modify febrile diseases, that I would not undertake to banish this finally from the list of remedies for bilious remittents.

The induction of ptyalism by mercury is generally considered as placing the patient out of danger. This may be, in most cases, accomplished by the internal exhibition of calomel.

But we sometimes meet with constitutions which resist its action in this way and oblige us to resort to other means for its application. In such instances the unguentum hydragyri may be rubbed on certain parts of the surface with advantage.

It would appear that certain states of the stomach are inimical to the action of mercury. Hence it is that we so frequently meet with patients with bilious fevers,

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in whom it is so difficult to induce ptysalism
the most reasonable explanation of this
circumstance we find in the sym-
ptoms of the salivary glands with the stomach
and the impression produced upon that organ
by its ^{no} unnatural contact overpowering or ma-
saging that of the mercury.

This is another argument in favour of the
use of Cathartics, both before and during
the exhibition of Calomel, given with the
view of affecting the system.

Mercurial frictions, as I have already observ-
ed, are advantageously resorted to when the
internal exhibition of Calomel is found
to be insufficient. Perhaps it would be
better in every case to employ both these
means from the beginning; for we cannot
foretell the obstinacy of the system against
mercurial action and while we are proving
it by experiment the disease may be making

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irreparable inroads up on the Constitution.

The methods of applying mercury external-
ly are, the mercurial plaster and frictions
with the soft ointment. Camphor and
opium are sometimes combined with
the latter to augment its activity.

Whatever may be our dependence upon
the efficacy of the mercurial impression,
it will be found necessary to attend to the
state of the alimentary Canal.

Its functions are very much deranged
by fever and morbid matter accumulates
and becomes a continual source of irrita-
tion, pro~~longs~~ the disease and aggravating
its symptoms. One of the best cathartics
in bilious fever is a combination of
Calomel Crem. Tart. and Gamboge. It
should be given during the intermissions.

Purgatives next claim our attention.

These may be said to be impotent antagonists

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of febrile action. When the surface is hot and dry, they are particularly serviceable. In this case we will range blood-letting with the class of remedies; it should at any rate, precede their exhibition.

Cullen was of opinion that their efficacy was dependent upon their nauseating effects, at least that they were ^{not} serviceable unless given to that extent, experience, however, has demonstrated the fallacy of this doctrine.

Among the articles of this class, the emetic tartar holds a distinguished rank.

This medicine acts in such small doses that its effects do not appear to be exclusively attributable to diaphoresis or nausea.

The stomach, however, is sometimes in so irritable a state as to prevent its use.

In such cases we must resort to the so-called diaphoretics, such as the effervescing mixture, &c.

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By a judicious application of the remedies which we have enumerated, we will seldom fail, under ordinary circumstances to arrest the course of the fever.

Proper attention to cleanliness in articles of clothing bedding &c and ventilation of the apartments of the sick, if not absolutely necessary, will at least facilitate the cure and greatly contribute to the comfort of the patient.

After the completion of the cure, that is after the disappearance of every febrile symptom, the debilitated constitution frequently calls for the assistance of tonics for the restoration of its powers. They should be given at first in small doses, according to the state of the stomach, and a moderate degree of skill will be sufficient to direct the gradual enlargement of the dose.

